

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 PARIS 00902 01 OF 02 111800Z
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O 111733Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4123

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 00902

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FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY VEST

E.O. 11652: X GDS 3
TAGS: PINT IT FR
SUBJECT: ITALIAN SITUATION

REF: STATE 303347

1. THE CURRENT FRENCH VIEW OF ITALIAN SITUATION IS A MIXTURE OF CAUTION, HOPE AND IMPOTENCE. CAUTION, BECAUSE GOF FEELS STRONGLY THAT EXTERNAL INTERFERENCE AT THIS POINT IS NOT LIKELY TO HAVE THE DESIRED CONSTRUCTIVE EFFECT, BUT IS MORE LIKELY TO INHIBIT THE ITALIAN PARTIES' DELICATE MARGINS OF MANOEUVER. HOPE, ALBEIT MORE AND MORE DUBIOUS, BECAUSE GOF, LIKE MANY OTHERS IN EUROPE, CONTINUES TO BELIEVE THAT THE LAWS OF POLITICS ARE SOMEHOW DIFFERENT IN ITALY AND THAT THE ITALIANS MAY THEREFORE ONCE AGAIN DO A HOUDINI AND EMERGE WITH STILL ANOTHER NEW LEASE ON THEIR POLITICAL LIFE. AND A SENSE OF IMPOTENCE, BECAUSE HERE AS ELSEWHERE NO ONE HAS ANY VERY PERSUASIVE IDEAS OF WHAT COULD IN FACT BE DONE TO SAVE THE ITALIANS FROM THEMSELVES.

2. THESE PASSIVE TENDENCIES ARE BUTTRESSED BY THE
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PAGE 02 PARIS 00902 01 OF 02 111800Z

CURRENT RATHER MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROAD FRENCH ANALYSIS. FOR THE SHORT TERM THE PREVAILING VIEW AT QUAI, AND WE BELIEVE ALSO AT THE ELYSEE, HAS BEEN THAT THE DC WILL BE ABLE TO RESIST DIRECT PCI PARTICIPATION--ALTHOUGH, AS IT WAS PUT IN A RECENT CONVERSATION THE DC WILL UNDOUBTEDLY HAVE TO MAKE SOME "SUBTLE" SUBSTANTIVE AND PROCEDURAL

CONCESSIONS. CONSEQUENTLY QUAI EXPECTS THAT THE DC WILL SOMEHOW MUDDLE THROUGH, AT LEAST WELL INTO THE SUMMER. EVEN THEN THE FEELING IS THAT THE SITUATION MAY NOT NECESSARILY CHANGE DRASTICALLY, SINCE THE FRENCH TEND TO AGREE WITH EMBASSY ROME'S RECENT OBSERVATION THAT NEW ELECTIONS WOULD PROBABLY NOT ALTER THE PRESENT ITALIAN POLITICAL SITUATION IN FAVOR OF THE PCI. RATHER THAN PERCEIVING AN EARLY CRISIS, FRENCH OFFICIALDOM CONSEQUENTLY TENDS TO FORSEE A CONTINUING, GRADUALLY DETERIORATING MALAISE. PRINCIPAL DISSENTER FROM THIS VIEW APPEARS TO BE THE CURRENT FRENCH AMBASSADOR IN ROME WHO, UNLIKE HIS STAFF IS REPORTEDLY MOST ALARMED AND MAY THEREFORE BE COUNSELING MORE DECISIVE INTERVENTION.

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PAGE 01 PARIS 00902 02 OF 02 111749Z
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S E C R E T SECTION 02 OF 02 PARIS 00902

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3. THE FRENCH VENEER OF SEEMING CALM, BORDERING ON PUBLIC INDIFFERENCE MAY OF COURSE BE DUE TO GOF'S DESIRE NOT TO DRAW ATTENTION TO POSSIBLE SLIPPAGE TOWARD THE PCI IN ITALY BEFORE FRANCE'S OWN CRITICAL ELECTIONS IN MARCH. WE KNOW THAT LAST SPRING GISCARD WAS INTENSELY CONSCIOUS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF AVOIDING PCI PARTICIPATION IN GOI BEFORE THE MARCH ELECTIONS. THIS CONCERN, WE ARE TOLD, HAS NOT ABATED, ALTHOUGH GISCARD TOO MAY NOW BE MORE INCLINED TO BELIEVE THAT THE DANGER EXISTS BUT IS NOT IMMINENT. HE THEREFORE SEEMS TO BE WAITING PARTLY BECAUSE THE FRENCH THEMSELVES

HAVE CONSISTENTLY CONSIDERED THAT THEY ARE PERHAPS
LEAST SUITED TO ADVISE THEIR ITALIAN NEIGHBORS--
EXCEPT IN THE DISCREETEST WAYS. AFTER THE FRENCH
ELECTIONS GISCARD WILL UNDOUBTEDLY WANT TO TAKE
ANOTHER LOOK. IF THE PCI SHOULD GET INTO THE
ITALIAN GOVERNMENT BEFORE MARCH (AND PARTICULARLY IF
ITS PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT IS FOLLOWED BY
AN IMPROVEMENT IN ITALIAN LAW AND ORDER) WE OURSELVES
EXPECT THE FRENCH COMMUNIST PARTY WILL EARN
MARGINAL BUT STILL NOTICEABLE BENEFITS IN THE
ELECTIONS.

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PAGE 02 PARIS 00902 02 OF 02 111749Z

4. HERE IN PARIS THE MOST USEFUL IMMEDIATE
STEP, IN OUR VIEW, WOULD BE TO ESTABLISH MORE
FREQUENT EXCHANGES WITH THE FRENCH OF OUR
PERCEPTIONS OF THE NOW FAST-BREAKING SITUATION IN ITALY
--IN THE FIRST INSTANCE TO NARROW POSSIBLE DIVERGENCIES
IN OUR ASSESSMENTS. SUCH EXPANDED CONTACTS COULD
ALSO PROVE IMPORTANT LATER TO PAVE THE WAY FOR
MORE CRITICAL EXCHANGES ON A WHOLE RANGE OF
FORESEEABLE ISSUES, IF, INDEED, A MORE SERIOUS CRISIS
SHOULD ARISE IN ROME.
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